RONELLA

Tjin Asjoe-Croes takes the helm of the newly reorganized ATA

It was with great pride that Aruba's Minister of Tourism, Transport and Labor, Otmar Oduber announced in November of 2010 that Ronella Tjin Asjoe-Croes, Director of the Tourism Corporation Bonaire, TCB, was selected to head the newly reorganized and privatized Aruba Tourism Authority- ATA.

For those who follow the industry news locally, it was fitting that Ronella, a native of Aruba, be appointed to be the first CEO of a privatized ATA. During her tenure at the helm of the TCB since 2005, tourism arrivals to Bonaire achieved their highest level of growth (17%) in 2007; two legacy carriers from the U.S., Continental and Delta, and the Dutch charter carrier ArkeFly commenced service to the island, Other milestones include cruise tourism increased from 50,000 passengers to 250,000 passengers; a new global branding; a new website, www.tourismbonaire.com, in English, Dutch and Spanish; integrating an online and social media strategy into the marketing plan and completion of an extensive 3-year Tourism Awareness Program providing free training to the island's entire population.

"Bonaire was a good school, a wonderful opportunity to test my ideas and to learn," confides Ronella, "Aruba is another ballgame entirely, the "Major Leagues," so to speak, and I am thrilled to accept the challenge and be a part of the reorganization of the ATA." She is onboard with the plan and actions of Minister Oduber in establishing a more efficient ATA and considers them "bold and brave."

Ronella believes that integrating media and social networking would be making better use of the island's Internet presence. "We have this wonderful program of recognizing our long-time repeat visitors and showing our appreciation. I would like to see their stories and videos on our FaceBook and Twitter pages. We need to examine all of our marketing practices and devise and implement a more integrated approach."

Ronella is taking the position of CEO of the ATA at some great personal sacrifice; she was married 3 years ago to – at that time – the Minister of Economic and Labor Affairs, Elvis Tjin Asjoe, who is currently the Commissioner of Tourism and Finance for the island of Bonaire. She will be commuting back and forth between the two islands. "When I heard they were looking for a new head for ATA, I decided at the last minute to submit my resume. After being offered the position, I could not possibly refuse, I felt so honored. Aruba has given me so much, how can I not give back and help my home island to be as successful as possible? I feel it is almost an obligation, but one I welcome."

"We need Arubans to feel a part of the process and recognize what the ATA does and how important our work is to the island economy," asserts Ronella. "We want them to feel confident with our work and proud of what we do. The simple fact is the reorganization offers us the opportunity to do this, as well as run much more efficiently with far less bureaucracy." The newly streamlined ATA will be comprised of approximately 25 less personnel than previously.

Ronella and the Minister began her new stewardship with a retreat for all the employees so as to become better acquainted and do some brainstorming. "I met personally with each new employee before we opened our doors in 2011; examined who was there and listening to what they had to say and what they felt was needed. We appreciate the experience of those who have been with the organization for years, but we need them to also embrace new ideas and procedures; they must be multi-disciplined and functioning, while thoroughly professional. We want the right people in the right place. Government has been working hard to pass the laws to renovate the legal status of the ATA; now we need reorganize in actuality to make it work."